city of
CINCINNATI

August 29, 2013

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

To: Mayor and Members of Council

From: Milton Dohoney, Jr., City Manager

Subject: Participation in Open Data Cincy

This memo is to apprise you of the Administration's participation in Open Data Cincy, a private, nonprofit effort to create a central access point for data about the Greater Cincinnati region.

What Is Open Data?
According to the Open Knowledge Foundation, "A piece of content or data is open if anyone is free to use, reuse, and redistribute it — subject only, at most, to the requirement to attribute and/or share-alike."

For government, this means making a wide range of data about the operations and finances of government freely and easily available to the public for review, interpretation, analysis, research and criticism.

Core principles are that data should be:

- **Complete:** All data is available (unless subject to valid privacy, security or privilege limitations).

- **Accessible:** Data is easily accessed via a central web portal that does not impose any special fees or charges to access the data.

- **Primary:** Data is collected at the source, with the highest level of granularity (not in aggregate or modified forms).

- **Timely:** Data is available to the public in a timely manner, ideally as soon as it is collected ("real-time" data).

- **Machine-Processable:** Data is reasonably structured, based on industry data standards, to allow for automated processing.

- **License-Free:** Data must not be subject to copyright, patent or trademark or trade secret regulation.

- **Non-Proprietary:** Data must be available in a format over which no entity has exclusive control.

Adopting an open data policy and implementing an open data portal can benefit city government, and, by translation, its citizens, in numerous ways.

The Administration believes open data has the potential to:

- leverage community-wide problem-solving;
- facilitate better planning and resource allocation;
- enable more meaningful civic participation; and
- build trust for dialogue and decision-making.

Background
Last fall, the Office of Communications held a series of conversations with Departments within the organization to discuss the feasibility of implementing an open data portal for datasets generated by the City of Cincinnati. Discussions centered on the principles of open data outlined above, opportunities that might be realized from an open data portal, any challenges or obstacles to implementation, and finally identifying datasets that we could make more readily available.

Taking into account current staffing and resources, it was determined that the City would not have capacity to facilitate a well-managed open data portal on its own, and instead would need to look to an outside provider. The provider identified as having the most public value was, unfortunately, cost-prohibitive at the time.

In June, Eric Avner with the Carol Ann and Ralph V. Haile, Jr./U.S. Bank Foundation approached the city about a regional open data initiative that he was considering. Given the internal discussions that had already taken place, the City indicated its willingness to be a partner in such an initiative, which has taken the form of Open Data Cincy.

Open Data Cincy
Open Data Cincy is designed as an aggregate repository, intended to incorporate municipal open data (i.e., more than just the City of Cincinnati), as well as data from non-profits, civic, and commercial organizations in order to give a more complete picture of the quality of information available on our community.

The Administration believes Open Data Cincy's approach has advantages over a portal owned and managed by the City:

- **The approach is more comprehensive.** While many large municipalities manage their respective public transit and school systems, the City of Cincinnati does not. Thus, any portal maintained by the City could have significant gaps in data related to civic life.

- **The portal is regional in scope.** Plan Cincinnati recognizes that the City is part of a larger regional ecosystem, and calls on the City government to collaborate with regional efforts to "improve service delivery, control costs and diminish duplication of services." Open Data Cincy is in accordance with that goal as outlined on page 218 of Plan Cincinnati.

- **A regional approach is more meaningful.** The potential of open data is unlocked not through one municipality sharing its data, but rather through sharing by numerous civic entities, at all levels. This allow for a deeper understanding and analysis of all aspects of public life and facilities greater problem-solving.

- **It saves time and money.** Although the City could offer to allow other entities, such as the public transit and school systems, to use a City open data portal, the City would need to bear the associated costs, for not only the related infrastructure itself but also for staff time to manage and oversee the project.

Next Steps

Open Data Cincy will be coming to City Council for a resolution in support of this effort.

The Administration is in the process of identifying datasets that could quickly and easily be uploaded to Open Data Cincy. Representatives from several City departments, including Police, Planning & Buildings, the Office of Environmental Quality, Enterprise Technology Solutions, Health and the Department of Transportation & Engineering have been asked for 2-3 datasets that would be "low-hanging fruit" to kick off the City's participation in Open Data Cincy.

The Law Department will be engaged to help develop guidelines, based on best practices already in place in other cities, for data that can be made public, to ensure the City does not release data that is subject valid privacy, security or privilege limitations.

It should be noted that, through the City's participation in Open Data Cincy, it is possible the Administration will encounter data that could or should be more well-managed than is current practice. The Administration views this as a benefit of Open Data Cincy. Because the public can suggest datasets they'd like to see, it serves as a sort of informal audit of City data that will help create better internal data management practices.

This report is for informational purposes only. No action of the City Council is required.

Cc: Meg Olberding, Director, Office of Communications